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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/27/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV KWBG KDEM JO IR SY
SUBJECT: KING, QUEEN AND FOREIGN MINISTER MEET WITH SENATE
STAFFERS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DAVID HALE, FOR REASON 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: A Government of Jordan-sponsored U.S. Senate staff delegation accompanied by Ambassador Hale met March 23 with King Abdullah. The King focused on Iran's role in Iraq, Hamas's electoral victory, and Syria. The King appreciated Capitol Hill support, but stressed Jordan will need continued help to face regional challenges. End Summary.

Deal with Iran's "Tentacles"

¶2. (C) King Abdullah said that Iran is difficult to deal with, so it must be taken "by the tentacles"- with the hope of loosening its influence in Iraq. The King described the Iranian government as smart and calculating, and spoke of his concern about Iran's support for Shiite "separatists" in Iraq as well as for Hezbollah and Hamas. Describing Iran as "the Godfather of Syria," the King expressed support for a free Lebanon - without Syrian control. He claimed the Iranians know a full-scale war would be difficult for America right now; Iran is "getting away with" playing members of the international community against each other. The King said Iraq's present situation is one of "tremendous civil disturbance," and stressed the Iraqi government (particularly, the Ministries of Interior and Defense) should unify before civil unrest worsens with time. "Iran is your major threat," said the King.

Hamas In The Spotlight

¶3. (C) (NOTE: The Staffdel's meeting preceded the 3/28 Israeli election. End Note.) Surprised by the recent election victory of Hamas, the King said "full focus" on Hamas will expose the group to the world "for what they are... (a group which) does not care who suffers." Waiting for the dust to settle after the March 28 Israeli elections, the King called for support for Abu Mazen, including French and American financial support. The Foreign Minister described Abu Mazen as "the only moderate institution." The King predicted Hamas would not be able to change its ways, and would be unable to improve the social and economic problems facing the Palestinian people.

Syria

¶4. (C) The King spoke of a marked increase in terrorists' attempts to infiltrate into Jordan from Syria with, he claimed, the SARG's support. He described a foiled attempt

to smuggle two suicide bombers into Jordan, and said Jordanian intelligence had information more were on the way. Citing improvements in the control of the Iraq/Syria border, the King voiced concern that more terrorists would head toward Jordan.

Domestic Political Development

¶ 15. (C) Answering a question about the role of sensationalist media in building barriers to Arab/Muslim cooperation with the West, the King said "I don't watch Al Jazeera because I am disgusted with the way they portray the West." He said some media are conditioning Arabs to fear the West as an enemy that wants to erase their cultural identity. Locally, a recent poll showed only 1.4% of Jordanians would be willing to join a formal political party, according to the King, who argued that this reluctance stems from a lingering, post-cold war climate of mistrust for participatory political engagement. The King suggested that change must come about honestly, and found hope in the fact that 60% of the Middle East is under the age of 18. "We must achieve reform. If we do not adapt, we will not survive", he added. The King urged the West to keep up the pressure to reform, but asked that it understand the nuances blocking political progress from moving forward quickly. He expressed his gratitude to Capitol Hill for U.S. assistance, and proclaimed Jordan has made great strides using the aid.

¶ 16. (C) Queen Rania cited the recent Dubai Ports World controversy as an example of how sensationalist media irresponsibly build barriers to cooperation. The Queen added that the events of 9/11 brought to the foreground the problems of polarization, saying the world is more divided than before. Describing biased media as serving an organized agenda, the Queen said moderates needed to organize themselves and to use media to voice their views as a countermeasure to the world's destructive voices. The Queen said Arabs fear the West as an enemy who wants to erase their identity; she urged the U.S. not to see Arabs as the enemy.

¶ 17. (U) Also present at the meeting were Queen Rania, Foreign Minister Abdelelah Al-Khatib, spokesman Nasser Judeh, Royal Court Advisor Farouq Kasrawi, and conoff (notetaker).

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